

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3601

June 3, 2014

Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW, - Room 7100
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller Dodaro:

I am concerned about repeated news reports of large firearm, ammunition, and military equipment acquisitions by certain federal departments and agencies that lack a clear law enforcement role. For example, the Department of Agriculture recently solicited bids for submachine guns and advanced body armor.¹ The apparent growth in paramilitary-style units within these departments and agencies is also distressing. Indeed, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) claims to train over 90 Federal agencies.² Some of these federal bodies have carried out SWAT Team-like operations reminiscent of paramilitary operations.³ There is certainly a requirement for law enforcement bodies to enforce federal law, notably within the Customs and Border Patrol, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Secret Service. However, the combination of increased weapons acquisitions, expansion in federal law enforcement entities, and increase in paramilitary-style operations would suggest a trend of "militarizing" a growing swathe of federal departments and agencies. Continuation of such a trend is dangerous to traditional and constitutionally grounded conceptions of federal law enforcement.

I request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigate this matter. Specifically, I request information on acquisition of firearms, ammunition, and military equipment⁴ from 2008-2013 by the following federal departments and agencies:

- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Commerce

¹ Cheryl K. Chumley, "Agriculture Department puts in request to buy body armor," *Washington Times*, May 16, 2014: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/may/16/agriculture-department-puts-request-buy-body-armor/>

² <http://www.fletc.gov/about-fletc>

³ Brian W. Walsh, "Beware the U.S. Education Department SWAT Team," Heritage Foundation, June 14, 2011: <http://www.heritage.org/research/commentary/2011/06/beware-the-us-education-department-swat-team>

⁴ Equipment transferred by the Department of Defense to one of the Federal departments or agencies

- Department of Education
- Department of Energy
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of the Interior
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Department of Labor
- Department of Transportation
- Department of Veterans Affairs
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Small Business Administration
- Social Security Administration

Specifically, I would like GAO to answer the following questions for each department or agency listed above:

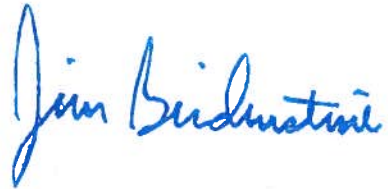
- What were its annual purchases of firearms and ammunition by type and quantity? Do aggregate firearms and ammunition purchases exhibit any trend between 2008-2013?
- What types and quantities of military equipment has the Department of Defense transferred to it?
- What are specific justifications supporting the firearms and ammunitions acquisitions and military equipment transfers?
- Does it have a unit charged with an independent law enforcement mission? If so, how does the department/agency justify operating an independent law enforcement unit rather than rely on traditional federal law enforcement entities and/or state and local law enforcement? What types of "SWAT-like" activities⁵ does the unit perform to execute its law enforcement mission? How many times has it performed such activities

⁵ SWAT-like activities means law enforcement activities performed by Special Weapons and Tactics police forces.

from 2008-2013? Examples include (but are not limited to) confronting heavily armed persons, high-risk arrests, and breaching homes or buildings to effect arrests.

I look forward to GAO's response. Please notify my office of receipt of this request and also provide an expected date of report completion. My staff contact is James Mazol (james.mazol@mail.house.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim Bridenstine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jim Bridenstine
Member of Congress
First District of Oklahoma
Committee on Armed Services